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## EPA's Print and Web Communications Product Review Guide

This site explains how the Agency's communications product review process works, and provides information about how to create effective Agency communications products. These guidelines apply to all media, including print, Web, audio-visual, and displays.

We invite you to read the material on the site before you submit your communications product to OCEMR for review. We also suggest that you consult with the Product Review Officer and the communications experts in your Office or Region to learn more about the product review process.

**[I'm here to pilot PROTRAC](#), the new Product Review tracking system.**

[Why does EPA have Product Review?](#)

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[What does OCEMR look for in a communications product?](#)

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OCEMR looks forward to collaborating with all of you to make sure that Agency communications products are accurate, timely, appropriately targeted, and suitable for their intended audiences.

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URL: [intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/index.html](http://intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/index.html)

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## Welcome to the PROTRAC Pilot

### OCEMR's New Product Product Review Tracking System for Web and Print

[Submit a Product to OCEMR](#) (PROTRAC Pilot) The pilot is scheduled to begin in March 2001.

The following Offices are participating in the PROTRAC Pilot and are the only offices that should submit products via PROTRAC:

- Office of Air and Radiation
- Office of Water
- Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances
- Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response
- Region 3

*If you are **not** in one of these offices, please continue to use the current product review procedures until further notice.*

[PROTRAC FAQs](#)

[View Products in Review](#) (PROTRAC Pilot)

[Take a tour of PROTRAC](#) (slideshow)

#### PROTRAC:

- Employs state of the art technology to automate OCEMR's Web and print product review process, making it convenient, desktop accessible and shareable;
- Provides a simple online, user-friendly form that generates a comprehensive inventory of all communications products under development at EPA Headquarters and the Regions;
- Saves the Agency time and money by giving product originators the opportunity to identify products in development and collaborate with one another across the Agency.

PROTRAC will replace all previous Agency product review forms.

All EPA staff who generate Agency communications products, regardless of format-- web, audiovisual, print, or display - are required to consult with the designated product review officer for their Office or Region, and to submit this form for each proposed communications product.

The form is designed to assure consideration of key aspects of effective public communications at the "concept" stage so that these principles will be incorporated into all Agency products.

By using this form, referring to [OCEMR's Intranet site](#), and consulting with the appropriate OCEMR program office (or Regional) liaison as early as possible, the Agency can streamline its review process, avoid last minute rewrites, and generate more effective communications products.

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URL: [intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/protrac.html](http://intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/protrac.html)

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## Why Product Review Exists

### Agency Policy

The Agency's Communications [Information] Product Review process was established on June 4, 1984 by EPA Order 2200.4A. Administrator Browner issued a letter dated July 30, 1997 extending product review to include products published on the Internet.

### Communications Product Review

Product review coordinates the planning and development of EPA public communication products - print, audio/video and web.

### Why Product Review Exists

- To help you better target your audiences
- To help you present your material in the most effective way
- To make sure your material is consistent with Agency policies
- To avoid issuing redundant or conflicting information
- To save your office dollars and staff time
- To provide you with professional editorial and graphic support and services

### Who Performs Product Review?

The Office of Communications within OCEMR/OA, in conjunction with the Product Review Officers (PROs) and Webmasters located within Program and Regional offices.

For guidance on developing hardcopy publications, please consult the booklet ***Publication Management: A Guide to Processes, Standards and Style (EPA 175-K-93-001)*** September 1993. Note: A new edition of this guide is scheduled for release in FY 2001. Please contact [Jim Ingram](#) for further information. OCEMR/OC will also make this resource available on the Intranet.

For guidance on developing Web materials, please consult the [EPA Web Guide](#).

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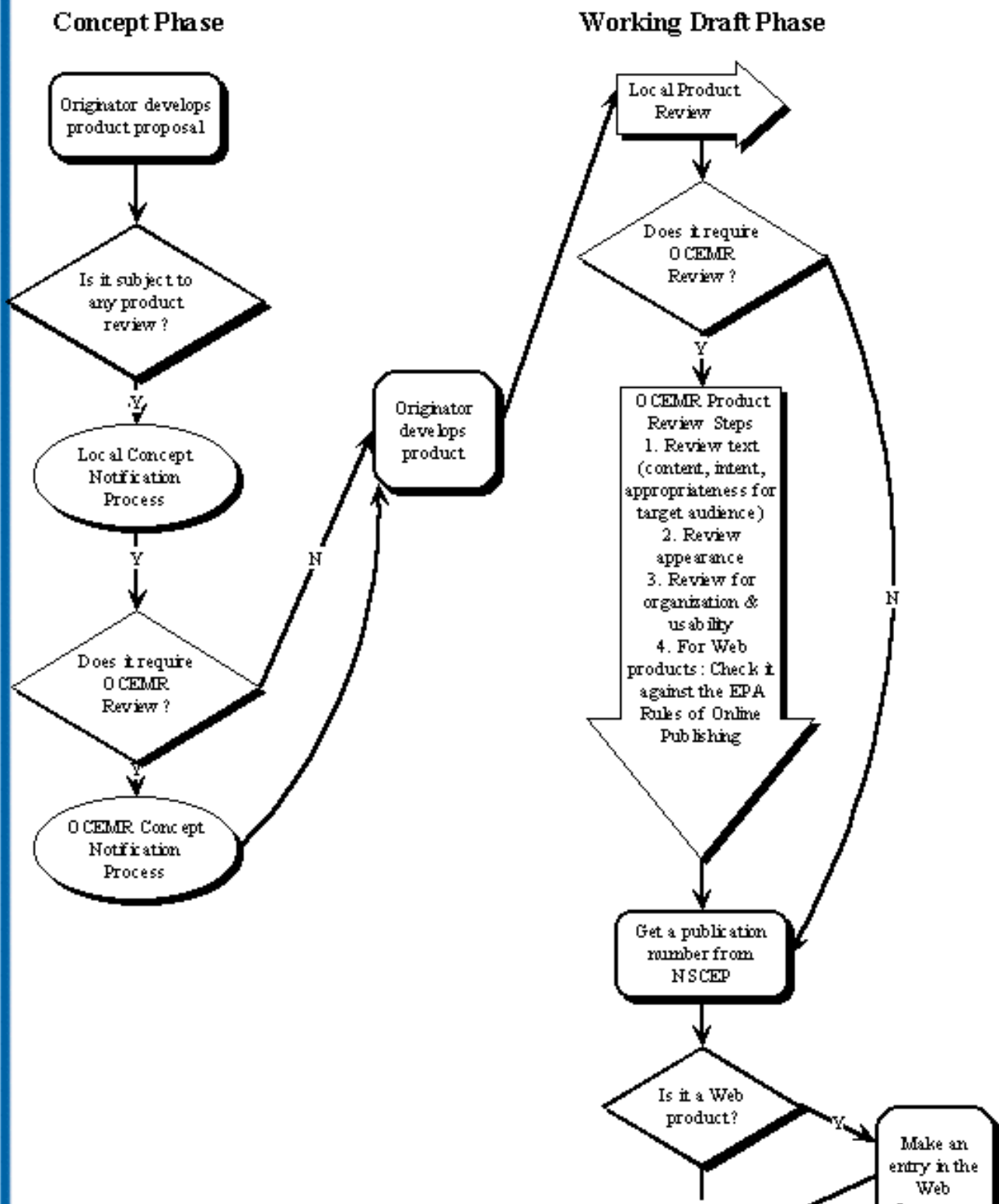
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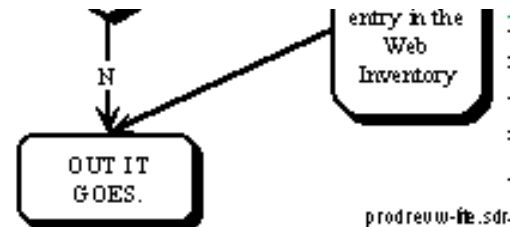


# OCEMR Office of Communications, Education & Media Relations

## How Product Review Works

### EPA Product Review Process





- Each Office or Region follows its communications product review plan and forwards new concepts to OCEMR/OC using [PROTRAC, the Product Review Tracking System](#). OCEMR/OC reviews them and responds within approximately 10 working days, telling the Office/Region whether it has the go-ahead to develop this product.
- The originating office produces a draft product and submits it to its local product review process. Then, if OCEMR/OC review is required, the originating office resubmits the draft product to [PROTRAC](#). OCEMR/OC will review the draft and provide comments within approximately 10 working days.
- Once a product has received final approval from OCEMR/OC, the originating office obtains a Publication Number from the [National Service Center for Environmental Publications \(NSCEP\)](#) at 513-489-8190. All electronic publications on Web or portable media (e.g. CD-ROM) also require a publication number.
- When the product is finalized, the originating office alerts OCEMR/OC with the final URL.

For guidance on developing hardcopy publications, please consult the booklet *Publication Management: A Guide to Processes, Standards and Style (EPA 175-K-93-001)* September 1993. Note: A new edition of this guide is scheduled for release in FY 2001. Please contact [Jim Ingram](#) for further information. OCEMR/OC will also make this resource available on the Intranet.

For guidance on developing Web materials, please consult the [EPA Web Guide](#).

Welcome to EPA's Intranet Guide to the review of communications products. This site explains how the Agency's communications product review process works and provides information about how to create effective Agency communications products. These guidelines apply to all media: Web or CD-ROM, print, audio-visual and display.

**OCEMR's new Product Review Tracking System (PROTRAC), an automated product review form and database, will be available online in winter 2000 to submit communications products to OCEMR for review at concept, draft and final stages. A number of EPA offices will participate in pilot testing PROTRAC through fall 2000.**

We invite you to read the material on the site before you submit your communications product to OCEMR for review. We also suggest that you consult with the product review officer and the communications experts in your Office or Region to learn more about the Agency's product

review process.

Prior to submitting your communications product to OCEMR, you may want to perform a self-audit by following our tips for effective communications products.

OCEMR offers a heartfelt thanks to all of our colleagues who helped bring this innovative system online, especially the Information Management Center, Office of Solid Waste & Emergency Response; Region 5 Office of Public Affairs; and the Information Access Division, Office of Information Analysis & Access. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with all of you to make sure that Agency communications products are accurate, timely, appropriately targeted and suitable for their intended audiences.

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URL: [intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/how.html](http://intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/how.html)

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# OCEMR

## Office of Communications, Education & Media Relations

### What does and doesn't get reviewed?

#### What Material *Is* Reviewed by OCEMR?

New or significantly revised materials bearing the EPA logo that have policy implications and are targeted to a specific audience (e.g. industry groups, community groups, educators, consumers, public officials) or the general public

#### Materials bearing the EPA logo, including:

- Agency **Initiatives**  
e.g. [Brownfields](#) , [Environmental Justice](#)
- **Recommendations for public action**  
(i.e., products that advise people to behave in a certain way)  
e.g., [Actions you can take to reduce lead in drinking water](#) , [Action Steps for Sun Protection](#)
- Information products designed to inform and educate the public about the environment  
e.g., [Indoor Air Quality in Homes](#), [Learn about Chemicals around your house](#)
- **Cross-program** or **multi-region** projects  
e.g., [Region 9 Animal Waste Management](#), [MTBE](#)
- **Materials produced by and for the Agency through contracts and partnerships**, e.g., [Metabolic Engineering Working Group](#)

#### What Generally *Is Not* Reviewed by OCEMR?

The following products only need Program Office or Regional Product Review:

1. Minor changes to existing materials that do not involve new policy
2. Products that are narrow in geographic scope
3. Web adaptations (HTML or PDF) of previously approved print products

#### Legal documents and notices:

- Congressional testimony
- Notices of Proposed Rule making
- Legal briefs and opinions
- Federal Register Notices
- Notices of meetings and public hearings
- Requests for Proposals
- Meeting plans and agendas

### Publications such as fact sheets, brochures and pamphlets

Fact sheets are prime building blocks for public information. All fact sheets are subject to product review unless they've already been approved by the Media Relations Office or Regional Press Offices as part of a press kit.

e.g., [Municipal Solid Waste](#) (fact sheet), [Home Buyer's & Seller's Guide to Radon](#) (pamphlet)

### Technical material:

- Documents targeted exclusively to technical audiences requiring specialized knowledge *that do not articulate new Agency policy and that are not available to non-technical groups.*
- Criteria and similar documents subject to a formal public comment period or review of the Science Advisory Board or the Science Advisory Panel
- Data bases

### Web sites

- New Web sites  
e.g., [Children's Health](#)
- Major redesigns of Regional or Program Office Web sites  
[OECA](#), [Region 4](#)

### Certain Reports

- Advisory Committee statements or reports; internal policy statements, memoranda and directives, and official correspondence.
- Inspector General reports
- Verbatim conference reports

**Videos, posters, conference displays, bookmarks, radio spots and multimedia products** are all subject to product review. Also specialized artwork/graphics used to represent specific programs, projects, teams, etc.

### Press Releases

(these are reviewed by OCEMR's Media Relations office)

### Materials produced under grants or MOUs

### Products Discouraged

Generally, give-aways such as magnets, coffee mugs, pencils, t-shirts, bags, and similar "gift-type" items are discouraged.

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URL: [intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/what.html](http://intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/what.html)  
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**OCEMR**  
**Office of Communications,**  
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## Web Site Evaluation Checklist

OCEMR uses this checklist when evaluating Web sites. You should run your product through the checklist before submitting it.

### Is it appropriate?

- Is it appropriate for the Agency to have a product like this?
- Does it fit the intended audience?
- Is the tone appropriate?

It should be objective, not prescriptive, not alarmist. Back up position with facts, rationale.

### Is it clear?

- Is the goal clear?
- Does the content match the title or the stated goal?
- Does it use plain language?
- Are all acronyms defined the first time they are used?
- Are links labeled well?

### Does it reference sources as necessary?

### Is it current?

### Does it follow EPA print and Web style guides?

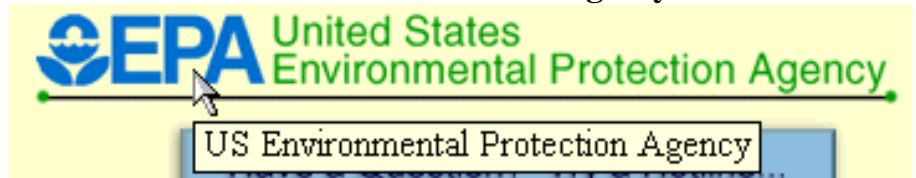
Does it follow *Publication Management: A Guide to Processes, Standards and Style* (EPA

*175-K-93-001, September 1993*)? (Note: A new edition of this guide is scheduled for release in FY 2001. Please contact [Jim Ingram](#) for further information. OCEMR/OC will also make this resource available on the Intranet.)

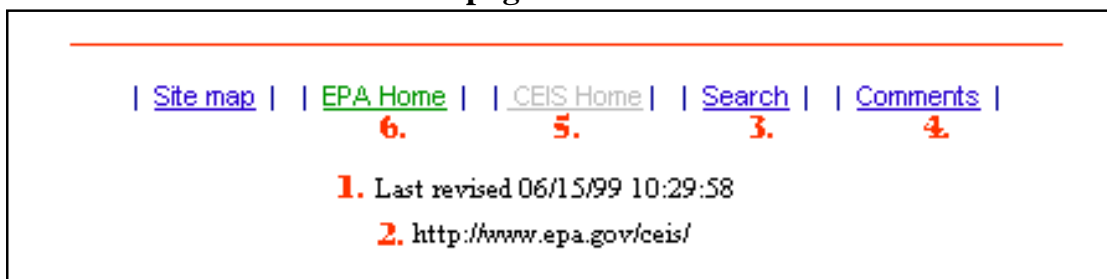
The [EPA Web Guide](#) has a wealth of vital information on creating EPA Web sites. Web authors and OCEMR reviewers should familiarize themselves with it, **especially the [Rules for Web Publishing](#)**. Check ["What's New"](#) for recent additions to the Webguide and [EPA Web Technologies Support](#) for updates on Web technologies at EPA.

The following points do not constitute the full EPA Web style guide; they are the most important guidelines to observe. Review of a Web product's style is not limited to these points. The goal of these guidelines is for every Web page to be clearly identified as an EPA document. Some of these points can only be verified while viewing the Web product in a browser; others can be checked from printouts.

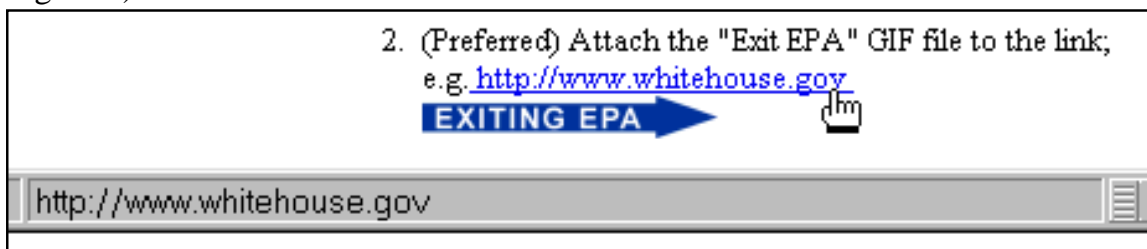
- **Is there a graphical side bar on the left hand side of every page, colored some shade of blue or green?** It does not need to be a solid color (it can be a blue or green pattern), and it may have content in it (it does not need to be empty). It does not need to be a set width.
- **Does the EPA logo (not the EPA seal, except in very unusual circumstances) appear at the top of every page, immediately to the right of the graphical sidebar?** The logo must not overlap the sidebar or appear in the sidebar. Is the EPA logo all one color (i.e., the flower design and the letters 'EPA' are all the same color)?
- **Does the logo have ALT text which reads "United States Environmental Protection Agency" or "U.S. Environmental Protection Agency"?** You can see the ALT text for a web graphic, if there is any, by moving your mouse over the image; a small pop-up label containing the ALT text will appear. See Figure 2.
- **Do the words "United States Environmental Protection Agency" appear spelled out in whole on all pages, either in text or in a graphic (as in Figure 1)?**
- **Does each Webpage have a title (see Figure 3), and does the title match the header (see Figure 4) on the page?**
- **Do the following elements appear at the bottom of the page? (see Figure 5 below)**
  1. Last revised date
  2. URL



3. Search
4. Comments
5. A link to the next level up in the site
6. A link to the EPA home page



- If it's an AAship or Regional Home Page, does it have these links?
  - About the Office or Region
  - Contacting the Office or Region
  - What's New
- If it links to any Web pages outside of EPA, does it use the "Exit EPA" icon and include appropriate [disclaimers as specified in the Web Guide?](#) As you move your cursor over a link, the URL shows up at the bottom of the browser window (see Figure 6).



- Does it meet [copyright guidelines?](#)
- Does it meet [Privacy Act guidelines?](#)
- Does it meet [accessibility guidelines?](#) Also known as Section 508, these guidelines are still being finalized as of October 2000. For the latest updates, see [www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov).
- Does it follow [EPA's guidelines for use of Web technologies such as frames, Java, Javascript, etc.?](#)
- Does it link to a PDF file (Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format)? Then that link should indicate a file size, number of pages, and a brief description or abstract, and contain an "About PDF" link to [www.epa.gov/epahome/pdf.html](http://www.epa.gov/epahome/pdf.html). That page explains how to use PDF files, and links to the Acrobat reader software so users can install it.
- Is it a personal Webpage, or one containing photos of EPA employees? Then it's probably not appropriate. Photos of EPA employees doing their jobs are okay; portraits of EPA employees for identification purposes are not.

## Usability

- Does this Web page load quickly, even at slower modem speeds? In 1999, this

meant 10-20 seconds at 28.8 kbps.

- **Does this Web page work well at smaller screen resolutions?** In 1999, this meant 640 x 480. Users should not have to scroll left and right in order to see everything on the Web page.
- **Are page layout and labeling of navigational buttons and links consistent throughout the site?** This way users can move around easily without having to learn a new "floor plan" for different pages.
- **Is the text short and easy to read?** Most users scan a Web page instead of reading every word.
- **Do all the links work? (They should.)**
- **Do the graphics enhance the message?**
- **Does this Web page work well with both Netscape and Internet Explorer browsers?** It should work with Version 3 of each.

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URL: intranet.epa.gov/ocemr-review/webchk1st.html

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## Publishing Tips

### Planning your product

The most critical work takes place before you begin your design. To help determine how best to communicate your ideas and to whom, sit down with your co-workers and ask yourselves:

- What specific information do we want to communicate?
- To whom? (Hint: the answer should *not* be "Everyone" or "The general public"!)
- How knowledgeable is our audience about this subject?
- How can we best put this information in context for people to maximize their use of it?
- What's our best way of delivering information to our target audience? The Web? Pamphlets? If so, how will we distribute this to our audience or alert them to its availability?
- With whom might we consult on this? Our communicators? Our coordinating committee? Other offices? Regions? OCEMR ?
- Have other offices at EPA or at other Agencies reached out to this audience on this issue? Have we contacted them to avoid duplicating efforts?
- Are we being consistent with what the rest of our Office/Agency is saying about this issue?

### Other Tips and Techniques

- Write in short, active sentences to get and keep your audience's attention.
- Avoid environmental and Agency jargon and remember the government's commitment to [Plain Language](#).
- Don't assume that your audience has prior knowledge of the subject.
- Include charts, diagrams and other visuals whenever appropriate.
- If you plan to use photos of people, be sure to convey cultural, gender, ethnic and racial diversity.
- Good grammar and syntax are important. Consult professional writers and editors. Spell check and grammar check your finished copy.
- Consult people who are experienced in public communications to better

shape and target your material to your audience.

- For Web products, use the [Usability Tips](#) developed by EPA Web Workgroup as guidelines for creating better Web sites.

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